

Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway Workshop II Series

Intrinsic, Promotion, Safety, and Implementation

Eighteen community members and agency employees participated in the workshops held over the two evenings.

Project Goal

The purpose of this project is to complete a Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for the Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway showcasing the scenery, historic significance, and extensive recreation opportunities along the route. These are the compiled notes from the two evenings of the second project community workshop.

The question was asked of Emilyn, what she saw that made this route different or unique. What is its niche in long list of scenic drives?

The route is enduring on many levels. It has a well-engineered route specifically built and designed for a scenic view. It offers two different driving experiences on either side of the reservoir and includes a unique loop-opportunity that can be started at either end with accommodating communities serving as gateways. In addition, it ties to multiple loop driving/recreation opportunities in the area. There are a multitude of interesting features and recreation opportunities, and a compelling history to share in addition to the scenic draw. The great travel ways and great gateways offer a good “trip planning” route for a day or multi-night trip.

Lincoln County Tourism developed a branding slogan several years ago – “Rich, Rare, and Remote”. The Rich and Rare are attractive to urban visitors, but important to use wayfinding, signing, and gateways to present the “remote” less intimidating for byway driving demographics.

Meeting Objectives

- To identify interpretation themes for the Lake Koocanusa CMP
- To share ideas on how to best promote the Lake Koocanusa Scenic Byway
- To identify safety concerns and considerations associated with the route.
- To seek community-based ideas for implementation
- To identify interested parties and invite their involvement

Meetings Notes

The meeting started with a recap of the previous workshops. An edit to the first workshop notes was suggested: add the Kootenai NF forest plan revision effort to the list of the ongoing agency planning efforts.

Interpretation Themes

Interpretation includes the strategies, techniques, and tools to share the story of a place. The byway program emphasizes six intrinsic feature categories. The question for a byway effort is how the information for one or more of the categories can be shared in an entertaining and educational way. This can be done through signing, visitor centers, welcome centers, printed, electronic media, and local service providers.

What story lines do the communities want to highlight? What is the overall story line for this byway?

- The rich human history along the reservoir – Native Americans, trappers, farmers and ranchers, logging camps, steam boats, the railroad logging, and the changes the reservoir brought and the new recreation opportunities. It may seem remote, but there has been a lot of human activity for a long time – how do we capture and honor that?
- The dam story – its history and development going back to Truman years. One of the few dams where the public can still take an internal tour. There is excellent on-site interpretation. The dam story is also related to the story of the towns that are under the reservoir. There's a message to share about the consequences to some communities to provide downstream benefits to other communities. A couple of other unique features at the dam in particular – design of dam by famous architect; the bridge was nominated as the most scenic bridge of the year when constructed in 1973; the bridge is the tallest and longest in MT.
- The ocean of public land. The recreation opportunities across those lands. There is an opportunity to educate folks about their stake in public lands.
- The working lands story – there are many places along the byway where you can show, as well as tell the story of working roads and lands in addition to the recreation opportunities. There is fire history along the byway and areas with various ages of vegetation treatments. Interpretation opportunity at the Big Creek RNA.
- The vermiculite story – folks feel it has had as significant an impact on the area as the dam. There is an opportunity for the communities to tell the story/craft the message. The history, the consequences, the clean-up, and the moving forward.
- The international story of the Columbia River Treaty.
- Most suggestion all tie to the topic of the human impact on the natural world.
- With 60+ paved pull-outs there may be an “adopt-a-the interp” opportunity. Each pull out could tell unique human interest story. (E.g., the guy in that Warland used to run the ferry across the Kootenai River. The story says he had a barn with a big TR on the side for Teddy Roosevelt). Richard Aarstad is a historian from Libby who now lives in Helena. He has researched of information about the towns under the lake.
- There's the story about the treatment of the Chinese laborers who came to work railroad construction. (implementation – list of story ideas)
- The recreation variety – water, hiking, hunting, winter sports. There are four seasons of recreation on both sides of the reservoir. Snow machine rentals are available but it is not yet offered as a guided experience. There is potential and it would be good for visitor experience and good for safety as well as provide economic benefits. Local communities have a good skill base for outdoor recreation. Nationally, guided experiences outside of the traditional hunting guides are an important developing industry. The FS is working to improve methods of communicating what's available to the local chambers and on the forest website. Eureka working on a kiosk in the park to map out opportunities. There is potential in the draft revised forest plan to expand guide permitting.

Promotion

How is the current mix of recreation and visitor services along this route? What would make it easier for the locals and increase visitation? General consensus is not enough.

There is room to improve outdoor recreation information delivery. This byway is surrounded by scenic byway loops that are actively promoted; the LKSB is not “visible” yet.

Important to communicate the route/area as an “off the beaten path” link between Spokane and Glacier NP. Summer traffic is often bumper to bumper on Hwy 93 between Kalispell and Missoula so the byway and/or Hwy 2 route can offer a more pleasant driving experience as well as scenic, historic, cultural, and recreation opportunities.

This area is in the Glacier Country tourism region, but tends to get left out of funding. The effort to promote the Kootenai River Country was developed to bring more visibility within the region. This does not have to be an “us vs. them” struggle within the region. It does not hurt the hospitality business in the Flathead to recommend this route back to Spokane (as the visitor is already leaving their area).

This will be the first, and for now, only SB in MT – that should be able to leverage MT tourism efforts to get listed on websites and ongoing advertising efforts.

There is promotional angle in Canada but there is a need for more recreation infrastructure and encourage Canada visitors to travel farther south. The Eureka recreation areas have become very crowded, the Libby area would like to draw some of that visitation share the economic benefits as well as relieve the pressure on the north end of the county. The current Kootenai NF forest plan limits marina development but there is potential in the draft revised plan for expansion.

A portion of the byway is listed on the Top Ten Scenic Drives promotional map as the David Thompson Historic Route. Good to stay tied with that effort (Alana Mesenbrink is currently) to continue that promotion effort.

The Crown of the Continent Geotourism effort is another promotion opportunity. Tracy McIntyre works with this group currently.

What about guided experiences – what would you like to augment?

The availability of guides’ licenses to do scenic activities was suggested. Folks feel the Cabinets are very unused.

Right now, there are 40 to 50 outfitter/guide permits on the Kootenai NF, which are primarily for hunting or fishing. Studies at MSU have shown there is a demand for other types of guide permits in outdoor recreation industry. The number of consumptive permits (hunting/fishing) on the Kootenai NF cannot be increased under the current forest plan, but there is potential for an increase in the draft revised plan. The lake management planning effort will be looking at the wider range of fee-based guiding the reservoir area could offer.

What about area events? They are a good draw because they make folks commit to coming now versus “someday”.

The number of area events has been growing. For many years, the only two held in Libby were Nordicfest and Logger Days. There are now four bike rides, the Blues Festival, and many others. Although the shoulder/winter seasons are quieter, the communities are close to capacity regarding hotel beds and community volunteers.

What are recreation niches that most community members would agree to share/promote? Social media has improved opportunity for target marketing. It may be beneficial to start with those unique features that locals are comfortable sharing instead of broad promotion.

RV sales have been at record highs. Potential to promote this area in RV magazines. This market is good for businesses as they have “storage”. Not only do they spend money on fuel and food, they have an interest in shopping at other area businesses for gifts or gear as they can have room to carry purchases. The north end of the county is feeling overcrowded by RV traffic, but the south end of the county would support this promotion.

Many Canadians purchase and leave RVs here in the U.S. There is potential to work through RV dealers to promote buying/storing here. However, adding recreation areas on the lake and improving education is very important. The planning department is facing issues with multiple RVs housed on private property in violation of planning codes.

Rock climbing is a unique market. Demographically speaking, climbers are typically young and typically techie. Type of demographic that likes evening activities such as restaurants or breweries. They are a good market to promote relocation. This is primarily a north end market; don't see them in Libby as much. There are potential conflicts as the climbing increases at Stone Hill. Education kiosks/signs would be beneficial. Full archaeological surveys and a management plan would be beneficial.

There are some concerns with promoting to **bicycle touring groups** because of the route speed, shoulder widths, and sight distances on Hwy 37, but routing the bicyclists along the FDR would alleviate some of those concerns. On the north end, there is potential to route bicyclists out of Eureka along the Rails to Trails and then on to the byway to avoid some of the narrow shoulder conditions at that end.

ATV recreation is a popular use with or without promotion. Forest access beyond open roads is limited and wildlife habitat issues limit expansion of ATV trails.

Snowmobiling is a popular local winter use. There is still potential for expansion and most community members may be supportive of this promotion.

Turner Ski Area has unique terrain in the area and there may be potential to expand summer offerings (e.g. mountain biking) if the permit holder is ever interested and there is a viable market.

There is adequate **trail** capacity – enough to support expansion due to promotion. High likelihood of general support across communities. The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail will be an opportunity to expand the market.

There is one underutilized **equestrian** facility that could be selectively marketed. Their spending profile not high, but values are compatible with the community. Although there are trails available, the infrastructure to encourage is lacking. The Forest could include on the list of potential recreation needs assessment after the draft forest plan is finalized.

The International **Mountain Biking** association has a lot of grant opportunities. They are always looking for places to go that don't engender any conflict.

There are some coves on the reservoir that are attractive for **canoe/paddle sports**, as is the river. Need more access put-ins for kayaks/canoes.

Shooting sports such as archery, black powder, and trap/skeet shooting are popular in the area. There are several facilities across the county.

Libby has a nice airport that is underused but promotion would help. There is an active **model airplane club** (Remote Control Club) that has a partnership with the dam.

Birders are a passionate recreation group. Although there are not any unique or rare birds here, there are raptors, pileated woodpeckers, and many other birds that are attractive birding draws.

Geocaching is another growing market. It is allowed on the Kootenai NF except inside wilderness. The ACOE is working with it, but prefers geocachers register as there are security issues with unmarked/unknown items in the vicinity of the dam.

Universal support for sharing **the drive** and the human history/working lands interpretation.

Motorcycle touring is a popular activity and the Dirty Shame is reopening with plans to market/target this demographic.

Promoting **water recreation activities** would be dependent on increasing facility and access development. Although the lake itself remains uncrowded, the access facilities are very crowded. Currently **fishing** on the lake is one of the biggest draws.

Safety

What/where are there safety concerns that the states traffic accident statistics won't necessarily highlight?

- Lack of maintenance on the FDR.
- Bicycle shoulder width issues between Libby and the dam on Hwy 37.
- The speed limit of 70 mph. It would be good to actively encourage the west side as the leisurely route for slower drivers.
- Congestion, pedestrians, sight distance, limited parking, and speed in the rock climbing area.
- It would be beneficial to provide emergency information for potential travel issues. There may not be a fix en route but there is potential to provide safety information at the gateways.
- Wildlife crossing the route.

Accessibility

The dam is fully accommodating. McGillivray Campground and Rexford Bench are accessible. The developed campground rec sites generally meet ADA requirements, but not all day use areas, trails, or vistas are fully accessible. The River Walk Trail in Eureka is accessible.

Implementation

If you could pick just one implementation item, what would it be?

- Open up views and vistas, maintaining visual vantage points through understory thinning.
- Facilities – access on the west side. Boat launches. Marina.
- Getting Glacier Country tourism onboard to promote this area more than they already do – as much as they promote the Flathead and Missoula. They are really good at what they do and could really help promote the area.
- Signage – interpretation, Kootenai place-name, wayfinding, and “slow traffic pull over” or “turnout ahead for slow-moving traffic”. Including carrying identity through all signing.

- Don't encourage too much development as the naturalness is the draw. One of the benefits of the federal ownership around the lake is there is limited opportunity for lakeside development.
- Highway maintenance. Mud/rock slides, potholes. Leads to deteriorating surface.
- Include suggestion in CMP that the state designation include the FDR.
- More guided experiences.
- Drag races on the bridge.
- Bungee jumping off the bridge.
- Toilets and picnic tables at the bridge. Toilets and midway confidence building on the FDR.
- Picnic tables/trash cans at pull-outs.
- Consistent speed limit signing on FDR (35 mph southbound/45 mph northbound).
- Interpretation at each creek (e.g., how did creek get its name?); age of harvest for various cutting units; and names/locations of towns/homesteads before the lake.
- Access to the water via trails off interpretive pull-outs for drivers with kids/dogs, etc.

Future and On-going Efforts/Events with Potential Effects

As the EPA finishes the vermiculite mine clean-up over the next 3 to 5 years, it will be critical to be in a position to come out from under that cloud and say to outside world this is a great place to raise a family, become an entrepreneur, start a tourism business. This byway effort, in conjunction with the other planning efforts, may be a catalyst for change in Lincoln County.

New hospital in Libby; hope to encourage new families.

There are kiosk and calendar with visitor/recreation information going in at Memorial Park in Eureka this fall. The Kootenai River Network has a three-panel kiosk is ready to install on the east side of the bridge (similar to their efforts at Osprey Landing on the south end of the byway.)

The dam (tentatively) is looking at developing a 30-site campground at the dam. It will be a good because to provide additional way-finding on the south end. The environmental assessment will be available this fall.

The draft revised forest plan allocates the area surrounding the reservoir as a primary recreation area (management area 7). There may be opportunities for expanding recreation facilities and opportunities when finalized.

The Congressionally approved draft route for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail intercepts and follows the byway route on the north end. Folks are working to deliberately route it through Eureka as it passes through the area.

The Lincoln County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy will be finalized by the end of the year. The final draft on the south end has been released; the final draft on the north end should be out by August. It would be beneficial to mention the SB in the tourism discussion to anchor it in the County's Plan as well as the CMP and the Forest Plan. Multiple-agency/community support documentation provides support to leveraging funding.

The Governor has begun outreach efforts for the statewide Main Street Economic Development Plan. There have been community conversation pieces in Missoula but Tracy has been working to get them held in rural areas such as Lincoln County too.

Sequestration has been affecting border crossing hours which may affect Canadian tourism visits.

There are some efforts in Congress to institute a homeland security fee (border crossing fee). Senator Tester is opposed. Although when visiting Canadians have been asked if it will affect their choice to come down to Eureka and Lake Koocanusa, the response has been that it would not, but that the fee result in a corresponding reduction in their spending at local businesses.

Although fuel costs affect the local area working class, it doesn't seem to affect visitor numbers much. A recent study by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at UM shows visitation is increasing despite fuel costs.

There is development planned along the Lake on the Canada side for a 400-site campground.

Current efforts are underway to evaluate whether the International Treaty needs to be renegotiated. If it is, there could be affects to lake levels.

Next Steps

Timory will compile the information gathered at the community meetings, research other required documentation, and develop a draft CMP to share with the communities by mid-August. The final CMP will be released before September 30, 2013.

The notes and all documents shared at the workshops are also posted on the Kootenai NF's website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projectdetail/kootenai/landmanagement/projects/?cid=STELPRDB5410418>.